

A BRIEF HISTORY

OF THE

New England Historical & Genealogical Register,

BEING THE PREFACE TO THE SEVENTEENTH VOLUME
OF THAT WORK.

BY JOHN WARD DEAN.



Less than nineteen years ago, the New England Historic-Genealogical Society was organized; and for seventeen years of its existence the *Register* has been regularly issued under its direction. The contribution that it has thus made to the historical and genealogical literature of our country is a just cause of pride. The seventeen closely printed volumes now before the public have preserved for future use many a valuable historical document that fire, vermin or the papermill had otherwise destroyed. But the preservation of the documents printed in its pages is only a small part of the service it has rendered to the cause of history. The taste for antiquarian pursuits that it has disseminated in the community has led to the preservation of a much larger number of documents which remain unpublished in private or public collections. The genealogical taste, too, that it has fostered among us has produced equally valuable results. The number of persons that it has directly or indirectly led to collect the scattered fragments of their ancestral annals would probably astonish most of us could it be known. The stimulus it has furnished to these inquiries was opportune. Aged people in whose memories were treasured the facts which explain records and supply omissions during the middle and close of the last century—usually found the most difficult period for the New England genealogist—were fast passing away. Many of the families whose record is now quite full, could not have been connected with the early settlers had research been delayed half a century

longer, or even to the present time. Those who would like to know how much has been done, since the formation of our society, in collecting and publishing the genealogies of American families are advised to examine the *Handbook of American Genealogy* by Mr. William H. Whitmore, a member of our present publishing committee. In addition to the published genealogies, there are, at this time, a very large number of family histories, the result in a great measure of the taste inspired by our society and its publications, which are wholly or partially prepared, but which have not yet appeared in print. Some of these it will be the work of the *Register* to bring to light and thus permanently preserve, while others no doubt will appear as separate volumes.

It will be observed that the *Register* was started soon after the formation of the society. Indeed, one of the three original members now surviving, Mr. William H. Montague, informs us that the publication of a magazine was one of the objects contemplated by its founders. But in the first "Circular" of the society, printed Jan. 28, 1845, just three weeks after its organization by the choice of officers — no allusion to a periodical is found; though a "Genealogical and Biographical Dictionary or History of all New England Families" is there mentioned as in contemplation. The first action towards establishing a periodical that the records show was in the following autumn. On the 4th of November, 1845, on motion of Mr. Thornton, the recording secretary, it was voted: "That a committee of three be appointed to prepare a circular or prospectus for the publication of a journal under the auspices of the society, devoted to the printing of ancient documents, wills, genealogical and biographical sketches, and historical and antiquarian matter generally — and to report at the next meeting." The committee then appointed, consisted of the Rev. Samuel H. Riddel and Messrs. Samuel G. Drake and J. Wingate Thornton. Additions to it were made at subsequent meetings, among those added being the president of the society, Mr. Charles Ewer. At the next meeting, December 3d, the Rev. Mr. Riddel, as chairman, made a written report which is now on file. The committee recommended the size and price which were finally adopted, namely, 96 octavo pages, quarterly, at two dollars a year; but the information then collected was not sufficient to venture an opinion whether subscribers enough could be procured to warrant commencing the publication. The committee was directed to continue its investigations. Later in the month arrangements were made with the Rev. David Reed, a member of the

society,—then and now the publisher of the *Christian Register*, a religious newspaper of the Unitarian denomination,—who agreed to issue a prospectus that the society might ascertain what encouragement, would be extended to the work. His prospectus for “THE GENEALOGICAL AND ANTIQUARIAN REGISTER, is now before us. It will be noticed that the words, NEW ENGLAND, formed no part of the proposed title. The document is not dated, but “Circular Number Two” of the society informs us that it was issued “on the anniversary of the landing of the Pilgrims.” This prospectus differs but little from that printed on the cover of the *Register* for January, 1847. The titles, as will be observed, are different. In the former prospectus, subscription papers are to be returned to “DAVID REED, *Christian Register office*, Boston;” in the latter to “SAMUEL G. DRAKE, Publisher, 56 Cornhill, Boston.” Mr. Drake’s prospectus, also, contains a few additions, and there are other slight variations.

The same day that this prospectus is said to have been put forth, December 22, 1845, a delegation from the society consisting of the Rev. Samuel H. Riddel and Messrs. Samuel G. Drake, Solomon Lincoln and Andrew H. Ward, attended, at Plymouth, the celebration of the 225th anniversary of the Pilgrim Landing. The subject of the proposed publication was brought to the attention of some of those present; and one of the delegates, we are informed, attempted to procure subscribers, but with small success.

On the 17th of January, 1846, another report was made to the society, and is preserved. The committee thought that a publication like that proposed, “if edited with the requisite labor and ability, and if issued by an enterprising publisher on his own responsibility” would “eventually secure an amount of patronage sufficient to render it a safe and successful undertaking;” and that the society “would have it in its power to render no inconsiderable encouragement * * * in ways not involving pecuniary responsibility.” It seems that Rev. Mr. Reed soon relinquished the idea of publishing the periodical—of the success of which we learn he was never very sanguine,—for on the 4th of February, about six weeks after his prospectus was issued, the committee reported that “progress in relation to procuring an editor and publisher was for the present put off.” During the year, however, “a considerable number of volunteer subscribers” was obtained.

On the 2d of December, 1846, a letter was read from the Rev. James D. Farnsworth of Boxboro’, offering to edit the magazine, but no action appears to have been taken on the offer. About this time,

or soon after, negotiations were commenced with the Rev. William Cogswell, D. D., of Gilmanton, N. H., as editor and Mr. Samuel G. Drake of Boston, as publisher. Rev. Dr. Cogswell was then editor and proprietor of the *New Hampshire Repository*, an ecclesiastical and antiquarian quarterly, then in its second year, having been commenced October, 1845. It was supposed that by adding the subscription list of that work to the names that had already been obtained and that would be obtained for the new periodical, a liberal salary might be paid to an editor, and a suitable remuneration be realized by the publisher. Accordingly, on the 16th of December a contract was signed. Rev. Dr. Cogswell's salary was fixed at one thousand dollars. The January number was soon put to press, and was issued February 5th, 1847. The result of the first year's experiment, we are informed, was a loss to the publisher. Very few of the subscribers to the *Repository* continued to patronize the *Register*, the character of the two works being different, while the price of the latter work was double that of the former.

Mr. Drake finding by experience that the profits of the work were not sufficient to pay an editor an equivalent for his labor, took upon himself the editorial charge of the second volume. Two other members of the society edited portions of the third and fourth volume. With this exception, Mr. Drake edited and published the work to the close of the fifth volume.*

Having it in contemplation to remove to New York the following spring, Mr. Drake, after completing the fifth volume, in October, 1851, surrendered the *Register* to the society. The Publishing committee then made arrangements with Mr. Thomas Prince, descended from

* The following facts relating to the *Register* may interest its readers. The editors have been as follows: 1847, Rev. Dr. Cogswell; 1848, Mr. Drake; 1849, Jan., Mr. Drake; April, July and Oct., William Thaddeus Harris, A. M.; 1850, Jan., Mr. Drake; April, July and Oct., Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, M. D.; 1851, Mr. Drake; 1852, Jan. and April, Rev. Joseph B. Felt, LL. D.; July, Hon. T. Farrar, A. M.; Oct., William B. Trask; 1853, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, Mr. Drake; 1859, 1860, W. B. Trask, Wm. H. Whitmore and John W. Dean; 1861, Mr. Drake; 1862, Jan., W. B. Trask; April, Rev. Elias Nason, A. M.; July, Hon. Charles Hudson, A. M.; Oct., J. W. Dean; 1863, J. W. Dean.

The publishers have been; vols. i to v, Mr. Drake; vi, Thomas Prince; vii to x, Mr. Drake; xi, Charles B. Richardson; xii to xv, Mr. Drake, xvi and xvii, Joel Munsell. All of these are now living, and are members of our society.

A list of the Publishing Committees will be found in vol. xvi, p. 289.

The indices in vol. i were prepared by Rev. Dr. Cogswell. Mr. Drake prepared the indices of names in vols. ii to iv, and the general indices in vols. ii to v, and vii to xii, inclusive. The other indices are by Mr Trask.

the same family as the New England annalist and possessed like him of antiquarian tastes, to publish the sixth volume, the editors of which were to be chosen by the committee. The contemplated removal not having taken place, Mr. Drake was prevailed upon the next year to resume the publication which he continued, excepting one year, till the close of 1861. Since then Mr. Munsell of Albany, has been the publisher, the society furnishing an editor. Mr. Munsell in offering to publish the work stated that he should not undertake the publication with the idea of deriving any profit from it, but rather as a contribution to a cause in which he felt a deep interest. The same feeling has influenced the editors who have gratuitously contributed their services.

To Mr. Munsell we are certainly under great obligations. He stepped forward at a time of unusual discouragement and has carried the *Register* through a critical period of its existence. A still greater debt, however, is due to Mr. Drake. For a large part of the time that the *Register* has been published, he has borne the pecuniary responsibility. Of the sixty-eight numbers that have been issued, fifty-two have been published by him. The editorial labor has also fallen largely upon him. Of thirty-eight numbers, or more than half the work, he has been the editor; and on many of the numbers edited by others, especially the early ones, his literary labor has been considerable. To most of the numbers he has contributed articles. The present editor — having been a member of the publishing committee for nine years, a longer period than any other person,* and having had considerable knowledge of the management of the *Register* before his connection with it — has had opportunities of learning something about the labor bestowed by Mr. Drake on the *Register*, and his pecuniary return for it; so that he can speak with some confidence on this point.

Other members of the society, besides the publishers, have done much towards sustaining the work. Some have taken extra copies, some have assisted in increasing the subscription list, some have helped on the literary labor, and some have aided in other ways; yet it must be confessed that a large portion of them have not been active supporters of the work — perhaps from the fact that they

* Next to him are the late Mr. David Hamblen and Messrs. William B. Trask and William H. Whitmore — the last two still on the committee, who have each served six years; the Rev. William Jenks, D. D., LL. D., who served five years; and the Rev. Samuel H. Riddel, Mr. Frederic Kidder, the Hon. Timothy Farrar and the late Mr. Charles Ewer, four years each.

have never been aware that it needed their support; for we should be loth to believe that there is any considerable number of our members who feel indifferent towards anything that promotes the interest of the society or aids its objects. Though members are not required by the constitution to subscribe for the *Register*, yet we can certainly appeal to them with more propriety than to others for encouragement and assistance. A little effort on the part of each of them would have a wonderful effect on our future success.

Many persons have expressed surprise that a periodical so well known and appreciated as this is, should have so small a subscription list. This, probably, is owing in a great measure to the nature of the work, which is adapted rather for reference than reading. As it may be found in public or private libraries, many who are interested in its contents manage to use it without owning it. We are informed that in some public libraries it is used more than any other periodical. Subscribers abroad have told us that many people visit them in the course of the year--not a few of them strangers--to consult the *Register*. The numbers of such persons which they mention have really astonished us. We have no doubt, from these and other facts, that if every person who has derived from a single volume of the *Register*, information that he would not part with for double its subscription price, had been a subscriber to it, the public would have had a better periodical, and he himself would have been able to derive more profit from its pages.

The *Register*, however, has had its sunshine as well as its shade. If its subscription list has been small, that list has borne many names of eminence and worth; and few periodicals have had firmer friends. A large proportion of those who have ceased to be subscribers, have only ceased to be such at death; while its losses by bad debts have been smaller than is usual with periodicals giving credit.

We have referred to the influence that the *Register* has exercised upon historical studies. That it has been of great service in fostering a taste for such pursuits,—not only in New England, but in other parts of our country, we have ample evidence. Among the testimonials of its usefulness in this respect, may be cited that of the author of one of the most voluminous and best prepared local histories yet published in the United States, who, writing some years ago, remarks: “I have been a student of the *Register* * * ever since its first number; and to it, as much as anything, I owe

the deep interest which I feel in historical and genealogical pursuits."

Another result that may fairly be set down to the credit of our society, is the establishment of the *Historical Magazine*—an offshoot from the *Register*—now in its seventh year. This monthly periodical, which was commenced in Boston, but was removed in 1858 to New York, has done and is now doing good service in the cause of antiquarian and literary research.

There is one characteristic of American genealogy, which the society and the *Register* have done much to encourage; namely, *thoroughness*. In other countries, too frequently, the pedigrees of a few families only are preserved, and it is not attempted to make even these complete. With us it is different. Our genealogists endeavor to obtain full and precise records of their families. This of course makes the American collections of more service to the scientific inquirer, than those of the old world. One of our New England writers thus remarks upon the result of such genealogical research and upon the influence of the *Register*:

"When genealogy assumes, as it will, the broad and comprehensive range of inquiry which belongs to, and ought to be embraced in the study, it will assume the rank and dignity of a science, showing the laws of physical development and its relation to mind and morals, thus exhibiting the causes and principles of progress and decay in the family and nation.

"In this view, the transactions of this society, and the kindred publications appearing under and attributable to its fostering influence, will present to the scientific genealogist, a vast field of observation, from which he will systemize great facts and deduce general laws of the highest moment in the improvement and elevation of man, showing not only what his condition *is*,—to which the present scope of statistical inquiry is limited,—but its causes and remedies."

Even among us, however, too little attention is paid to the collection of facts that will be of service in a scientific point of view. What facts are most important, our readers may learn from a very suggestive essay on *Philosophical Genealogy* prefixed to the "Shattuck Memorial" by the first vice-president of our society, the late Lemuel Shattuck, Esq., whose reputation as a statistician is well known.

The important feature in all historical works is truth—correctness. We have aimed at this in conducting the *Register*. The utmost care, however, does not prevent mistakes, as *Sigma* has shown. "It may afford," says he, "some consolation to publishers

who in spite of all their vigilance and toil are reminded occasionally of *corrigenda*, to know that the famed antiquarian, Sir William Dugdale, whose accuracy was a proverb, after having devoted thirty years to the preparation of his *Baronage of England*, sent the manuscript to Anthony Wood, the compiler of the *Fasti* and *Athenæ Oxoniensis*, who devoted an entire vacation to a rigid scrutiny of the work, and returned it with sixteen folio sheets of corrections and still more of additions."

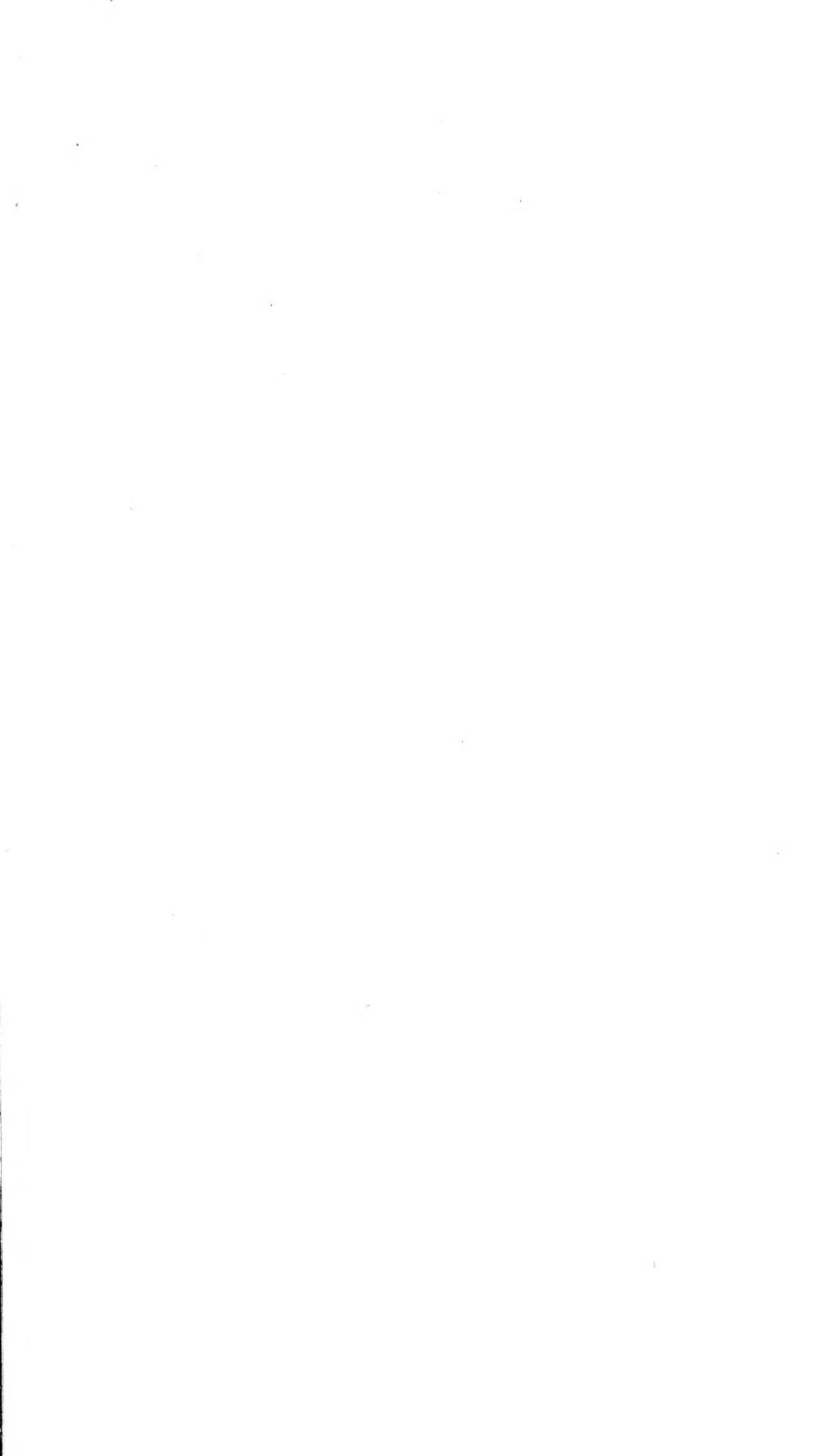
We believe that the *Register* contains as few errors as any other publication in which names and figures are principal features. We find, however, more errors than we could wish for; and, undoubtedly, many others escape our eye. To those who will point out any which they may discover, we shall feel truly grateful. It is our wish to correct them as fast as they are brought to our notice. A periodical has an advantage, in this respect, over other publications.

The war has had its effect on the *Register* as it has upon all American magazines. It has called readers and contributors from their usual pursuits to the camp and to other service in aid of their country. They are now making history instead of studying it. Feeling that all which is valuable in our institutions is at stake, we can not but hope that the lessons and memories of the past will be cherished in their hearts, and prove a stimulus to patriotic and heroic action.

And now tendering our thanks to correspondents and others for their assistance during the past fifteen months, we would express a hope that the *Register* may continue to glean the fields of history and genealogy long after its present conductors are in their graves. The materials are abundant, and are constantly increasing. That our successors may find as ready and faithful friends as we have found, is also our sincere wish.

Boston, Massachusetts, September 25, 1863.

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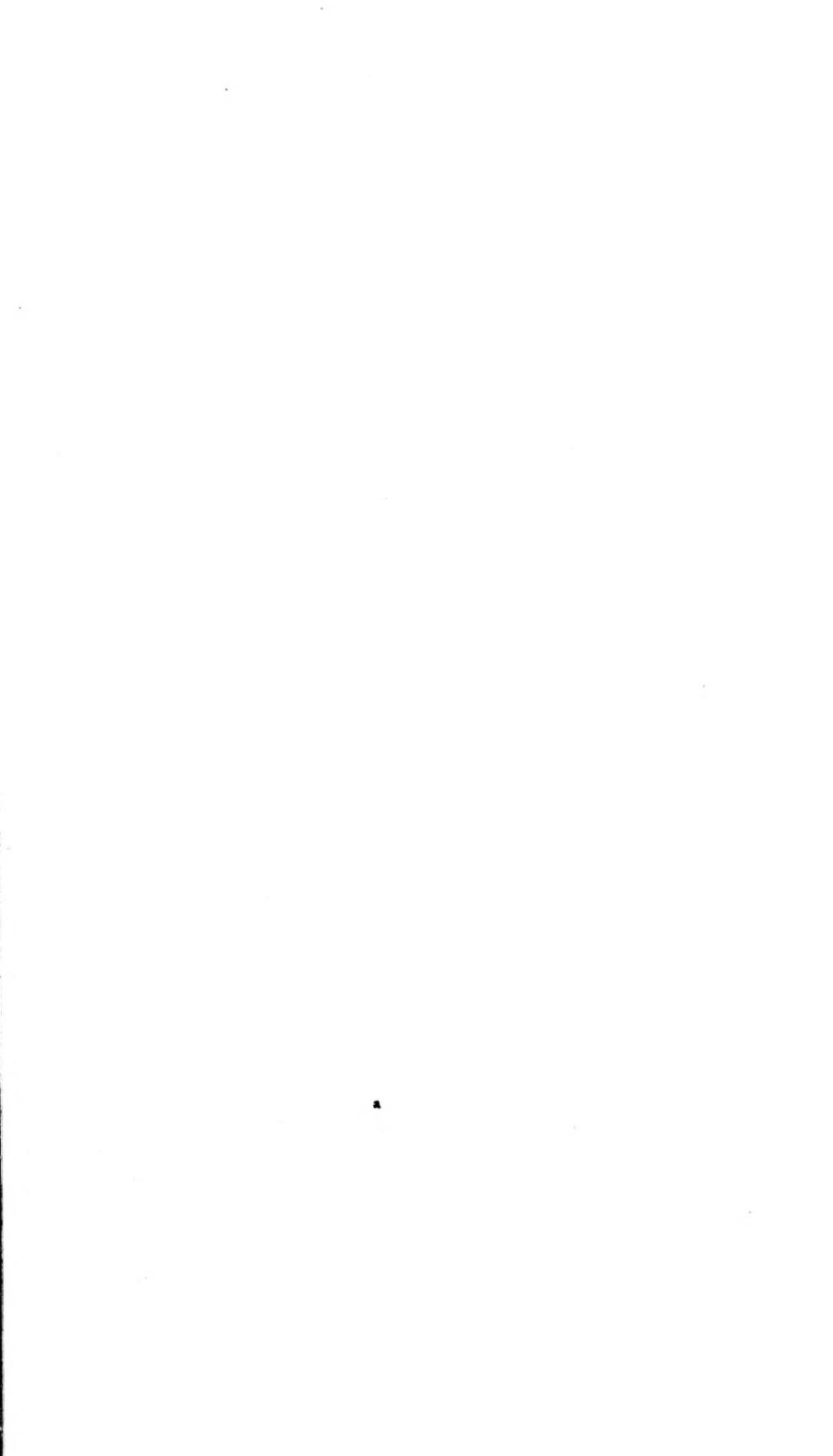




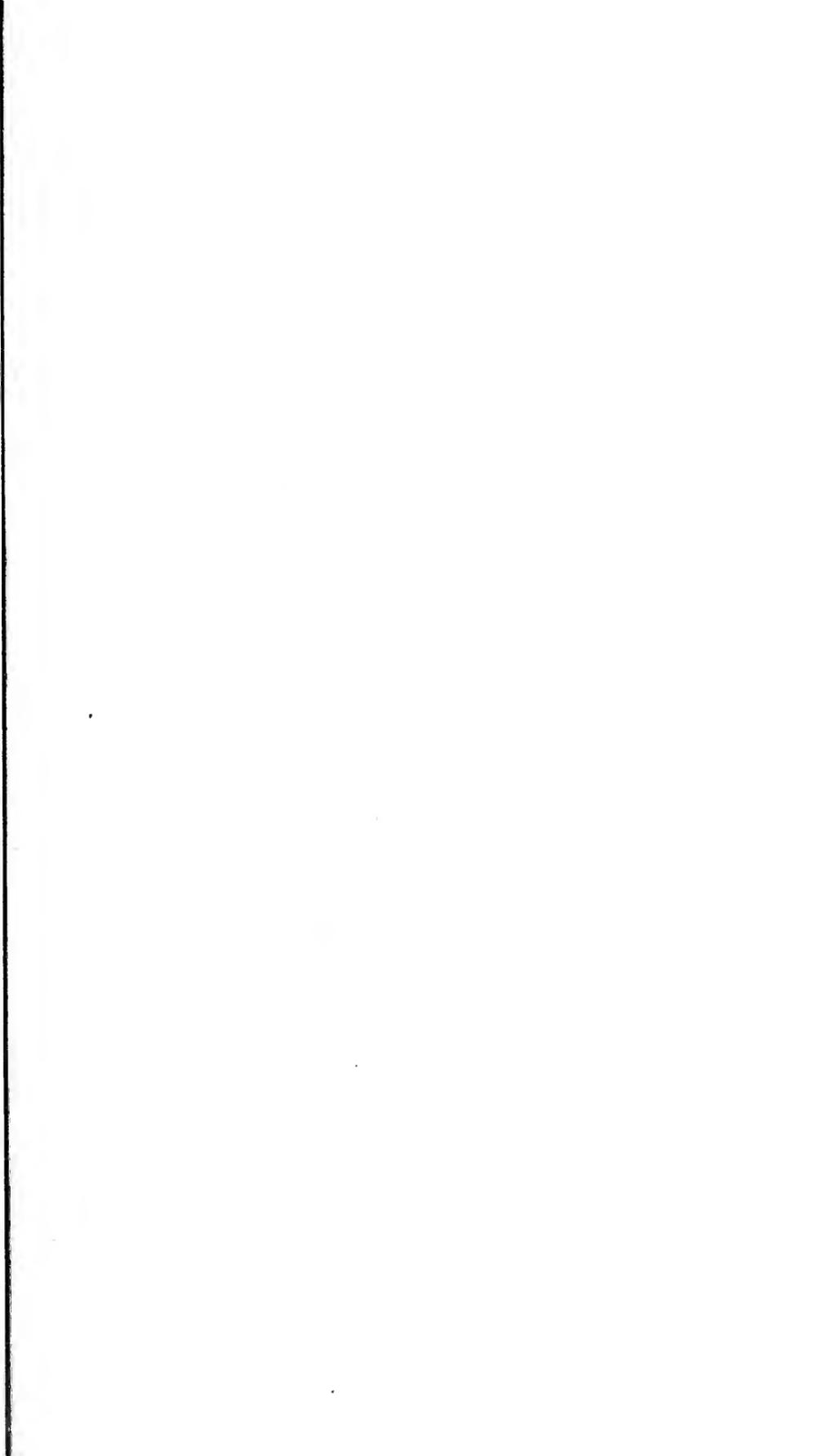








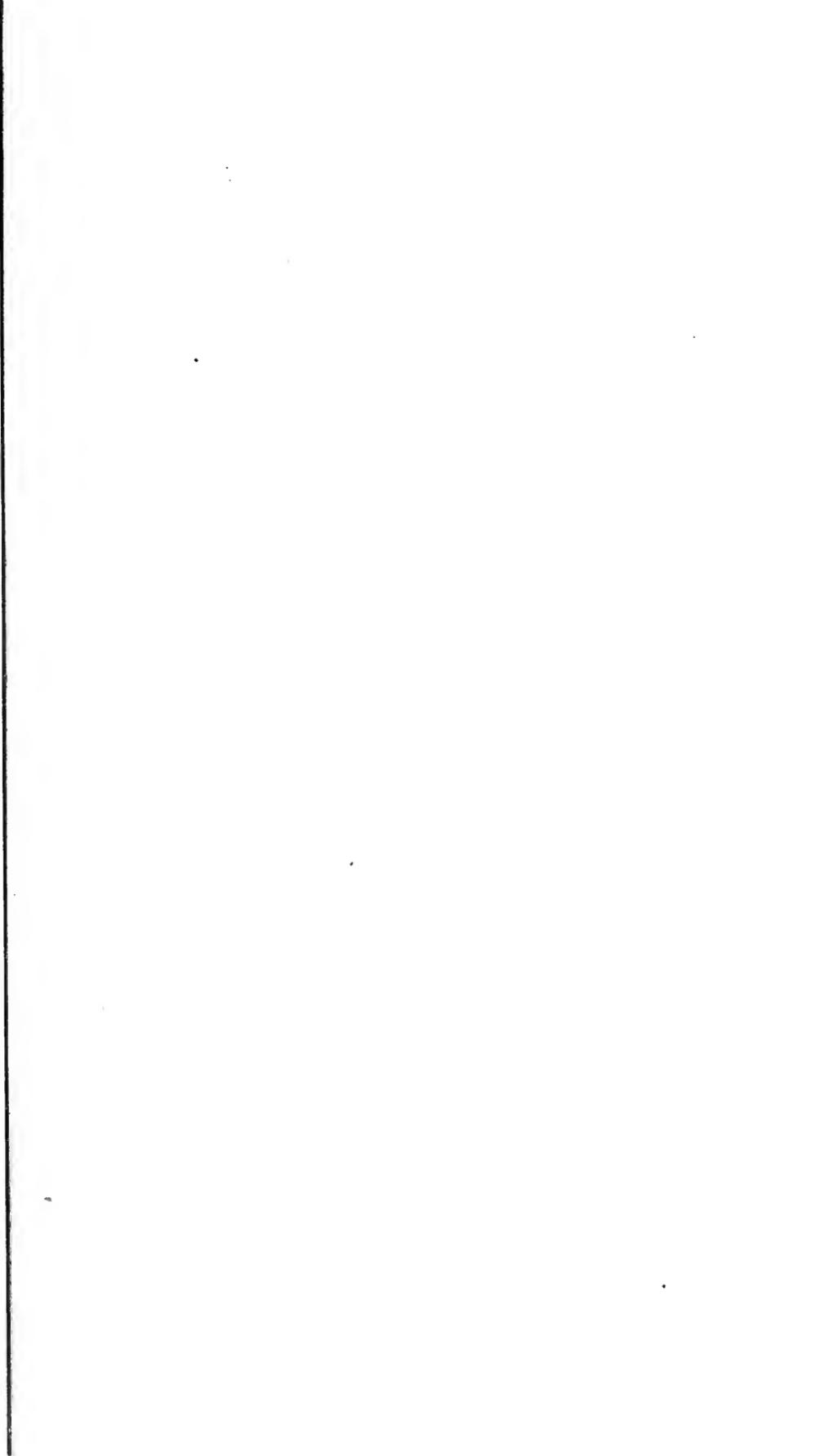






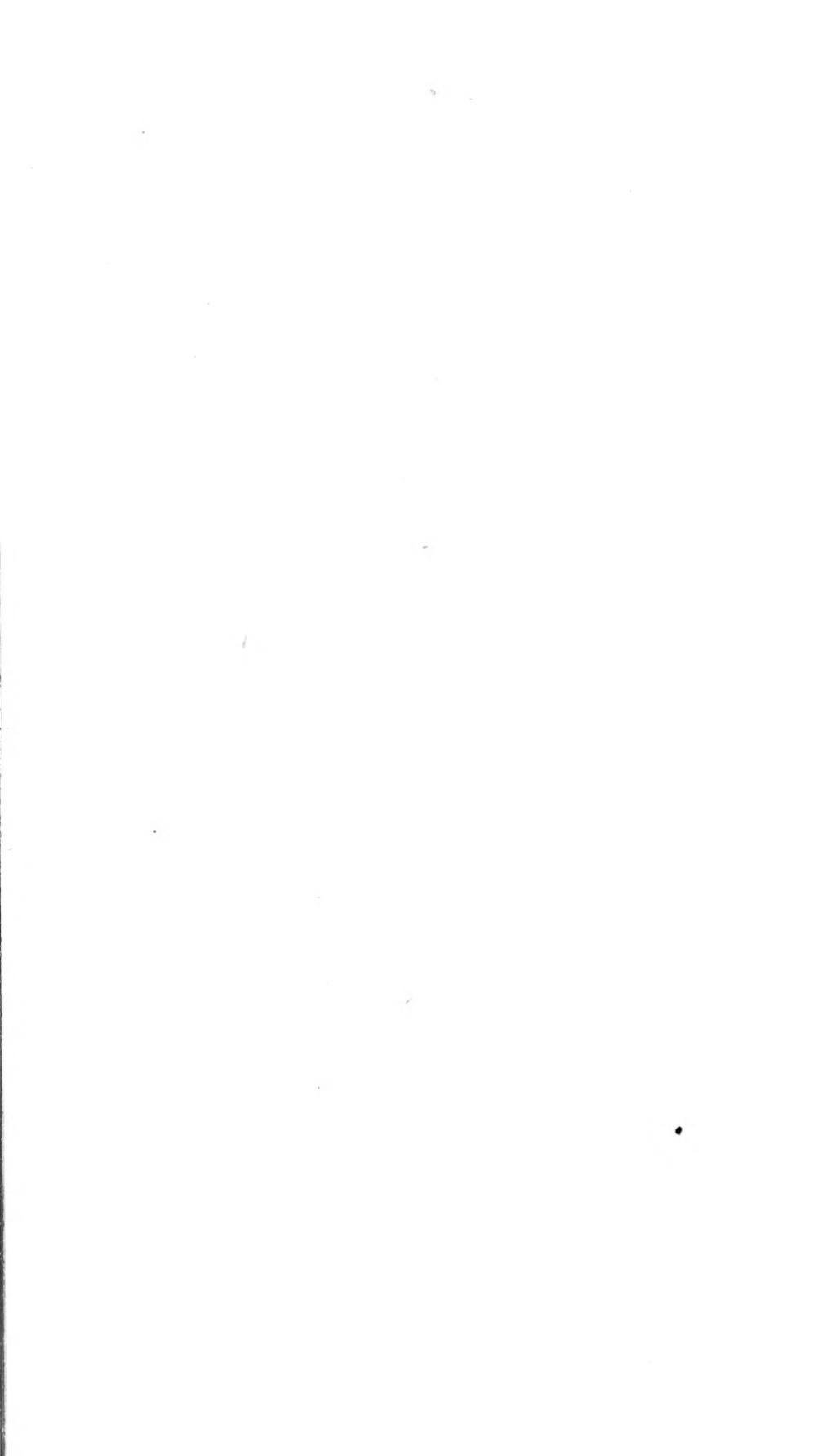


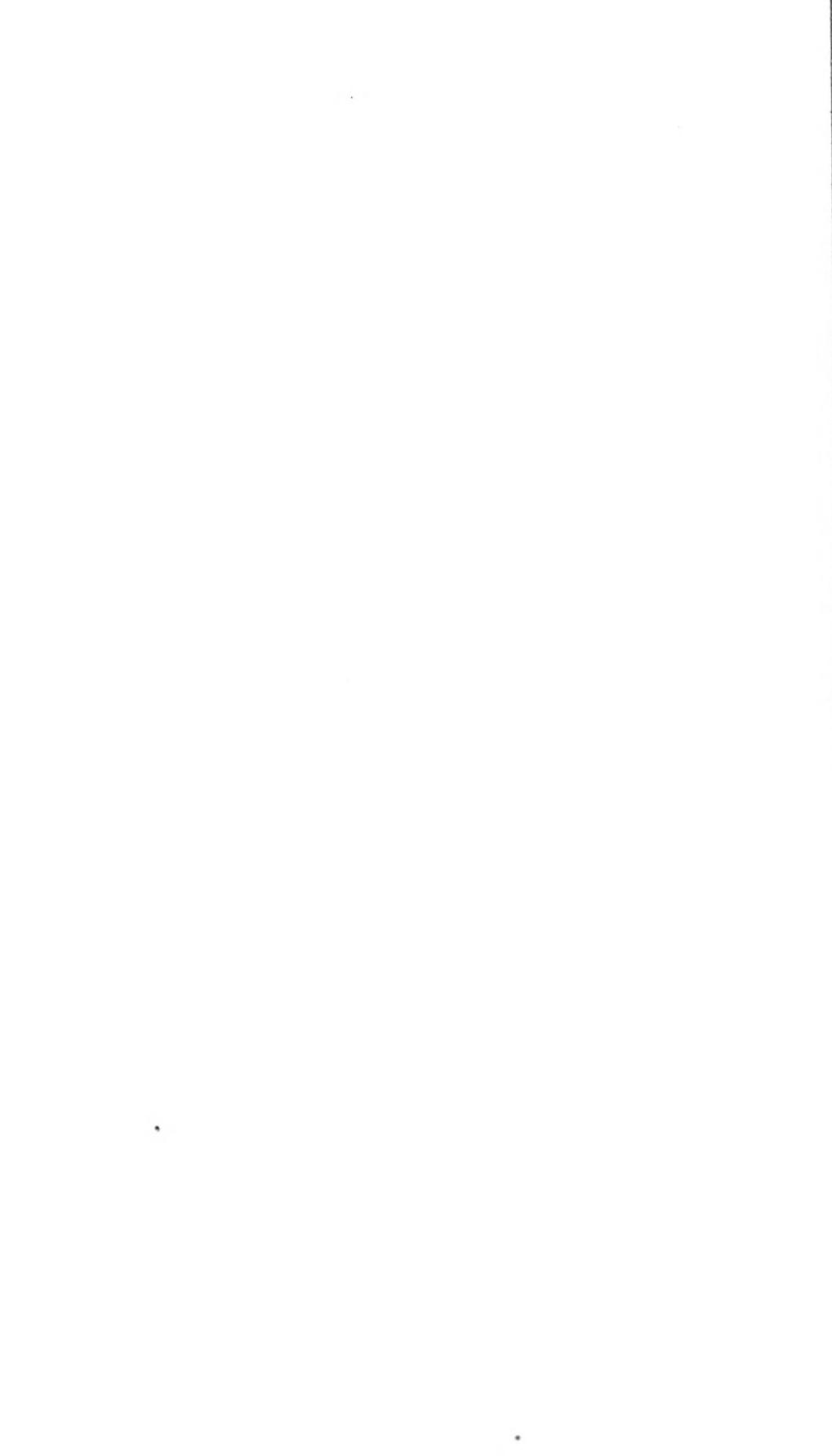






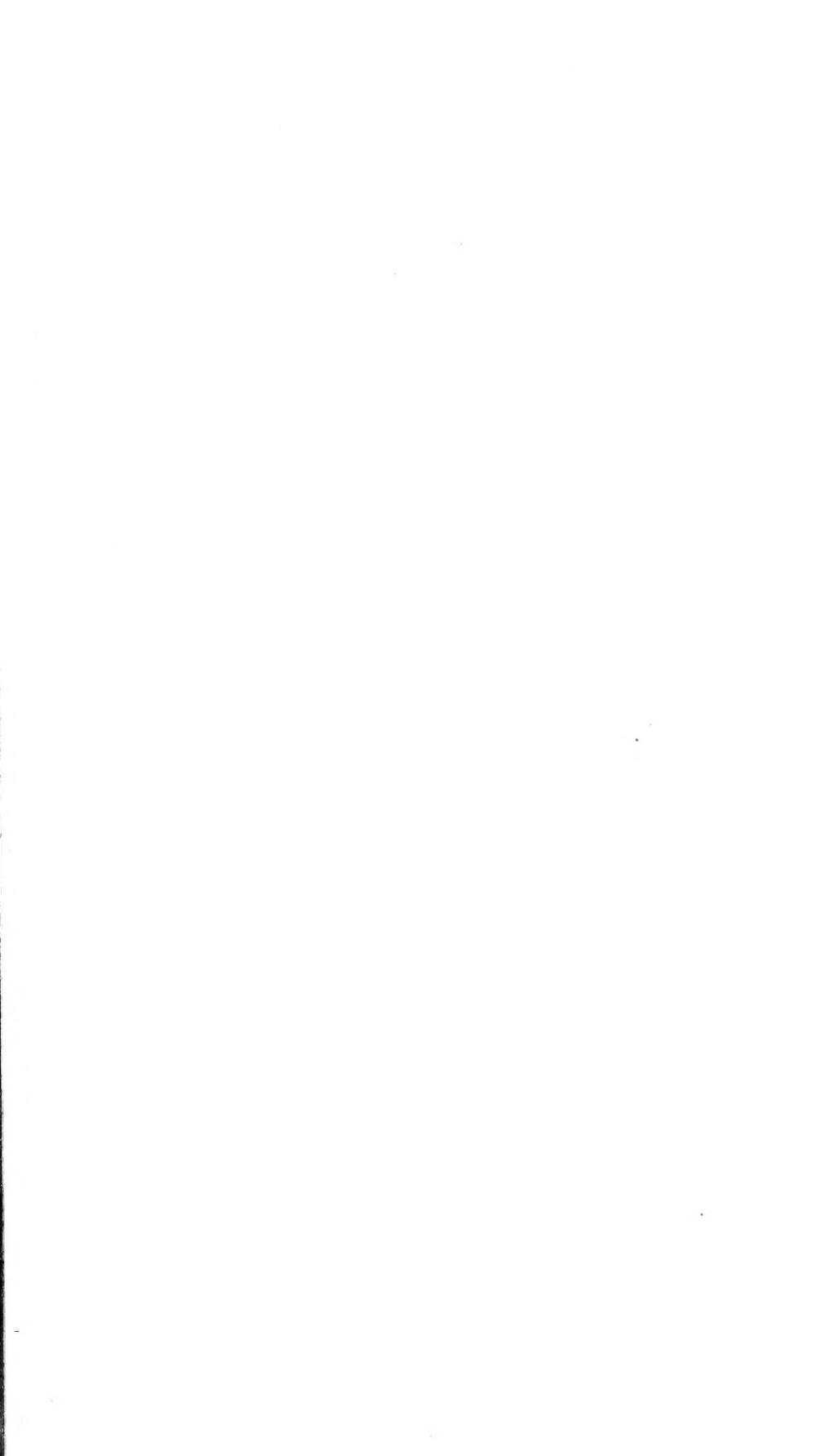


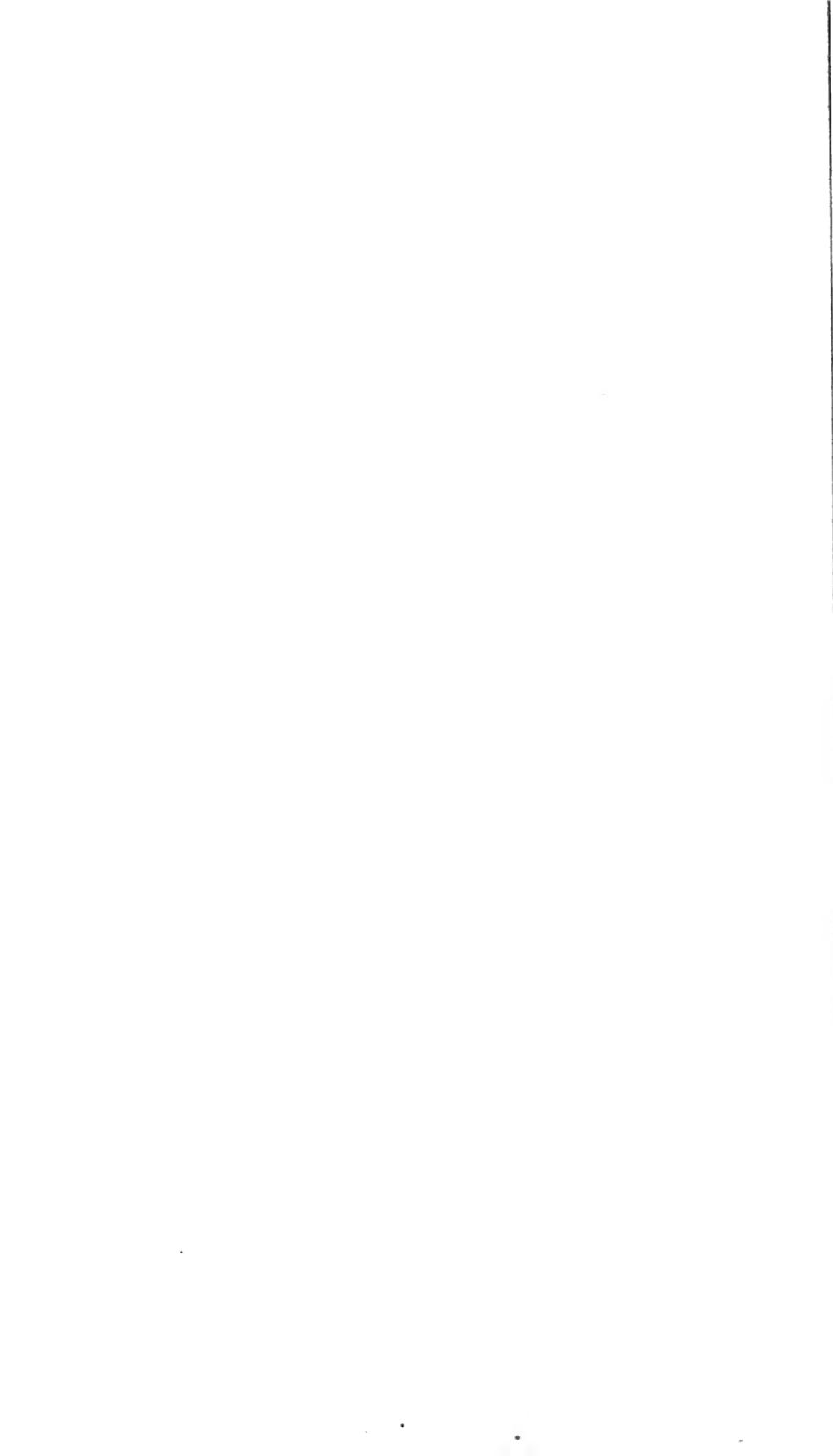


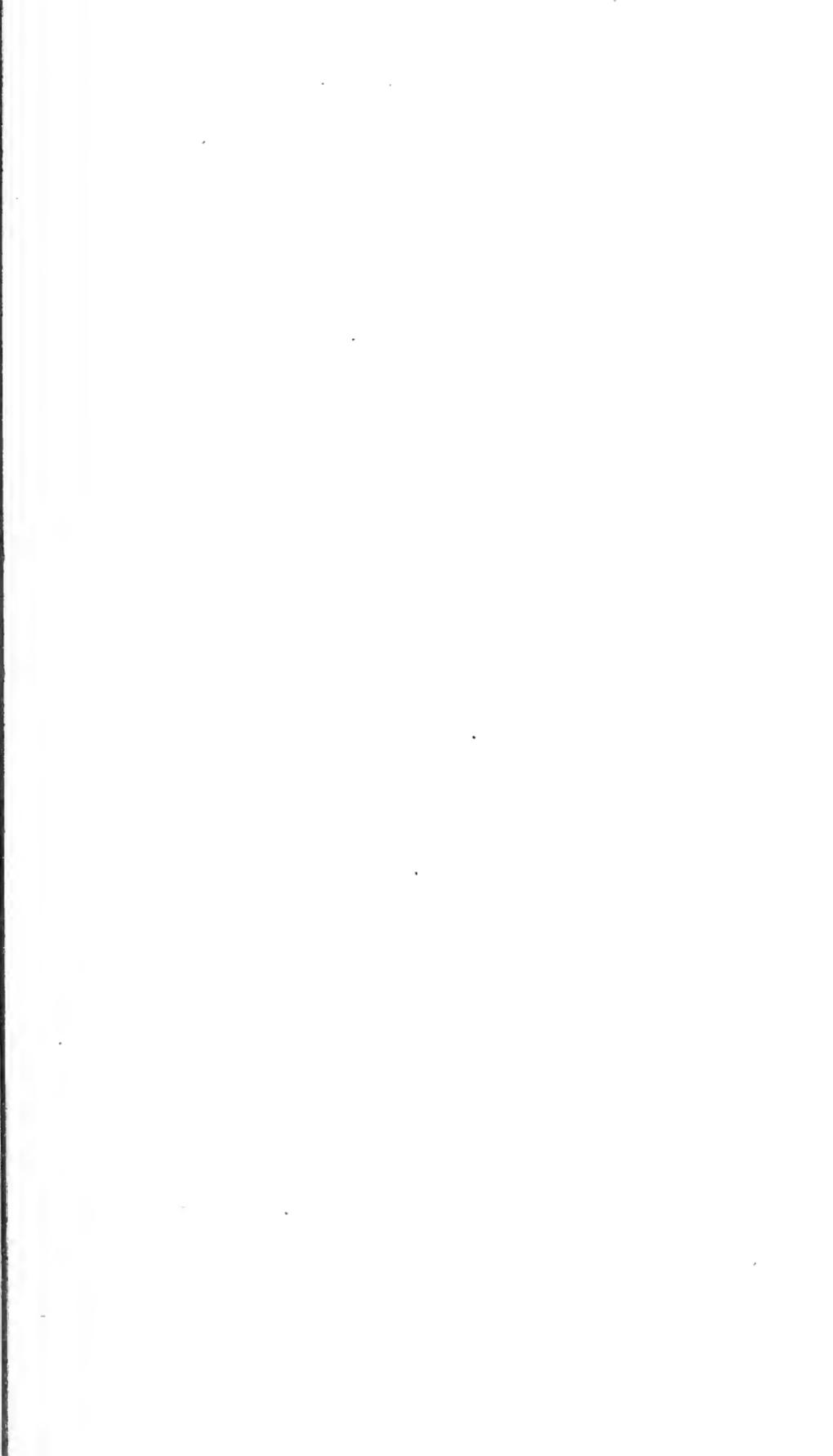






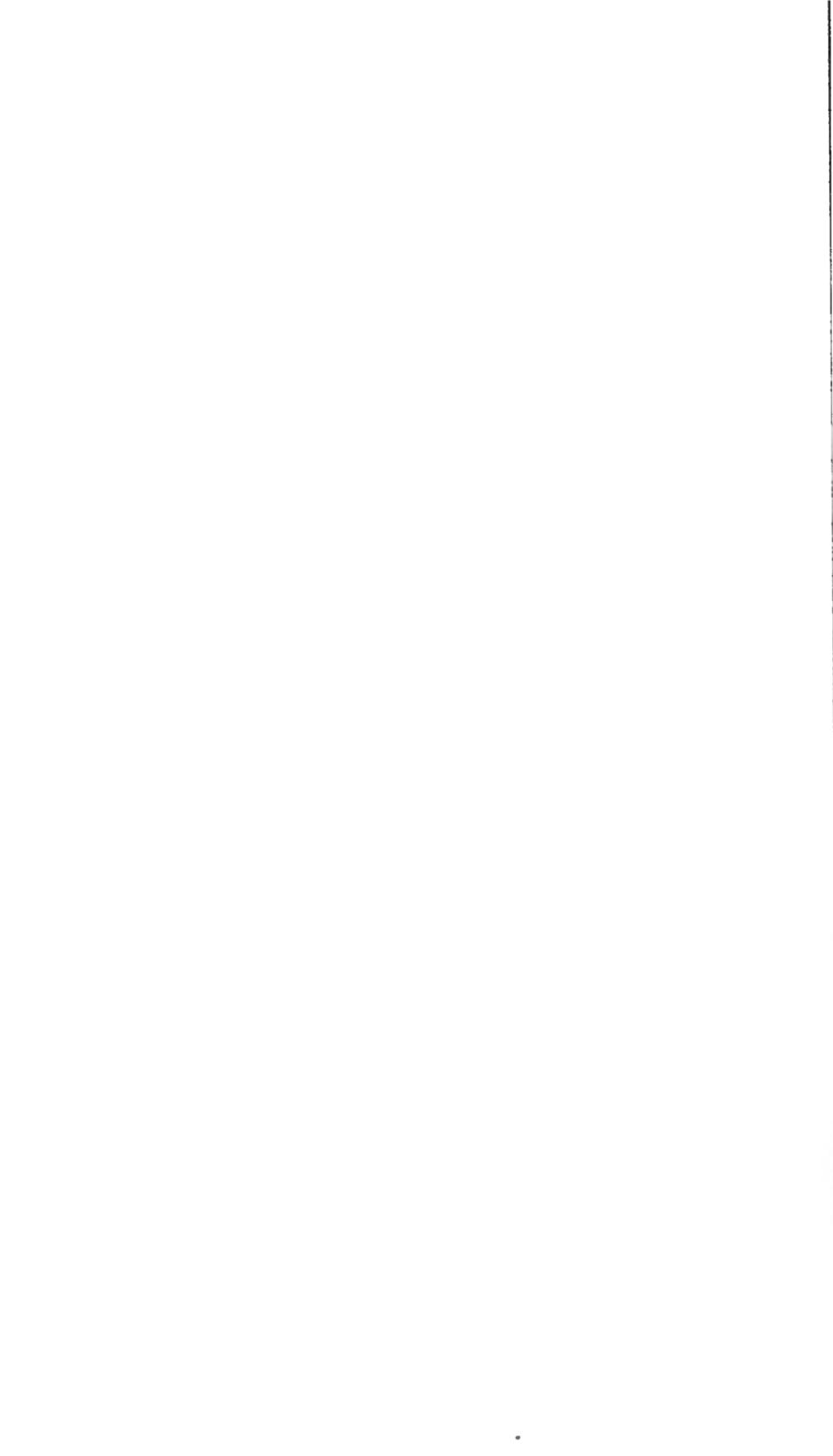














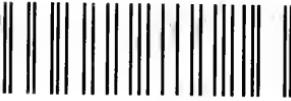


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